



Librarians and Access to Justice Outreach: Project Report & Resources

www.communitylegalcentre.ca/news/2015/Librarians-and-access2justice-report.pdf

WHAT WE LEARNED: 10 LESSONS

- 1. Providing a rationale to library staff about why this legal awareness and referral work could be important to patrons and finding a common purpose were critical to our success.** The project backgrounder about access to justice filled this need as did the reflective dialogue during our focus group that helped to clarify our shared vision of connecting the people to the legal information and help they need.
- 2. Providing expertise to help the public librarians identify credible and helpful legal resources was an important step.** However creating a list of reliable legal reference books was challenging because this list would need yearly updating and we did not have the resources to do this. Collaboration with the local Law Association and with the courthouse librarian was essential as community legal clinics (CLCs) don't practice all areas of the law. We also knew the small libraries could ill afford to purchase any of the handbooks. We were interested to hear that the B.C. Courthouse librarians update their recommended list annually and also appear to provide funding to the public libraries for the purchase of important texts.
- 3. It is important to use the time of librarians as efficiently as possible and to ensure we are meeting their needs. Building good working relationships is critical!** We must make their work easier. Small urban, rural and remote libraries have limited budgets, especially the smaller rural libraries. This also limits whether their staff can attend learning events (hence the attractiveness of webinars), purchase resources (hence the attraction of Your Legal Rights and CLEO materials) and restricts hours of operation (hence the need for CLC staff to know hours of operation to make good referrals for free computer access and for the printing of documents.) It is important to make special efforts to reach the smaller libraries, travelling to where they are, at least the first time.

4. **Customizing the training workshops to the learning needs of local staff and using adult education methods was imperative.** Library staff became more confident about making legal referrals after the workshops held in November 2011 and May 2012. Part of the success of the training was using the “persona” case study approach and other adult learning methods. We learned from our evaluation what we should do to improve the next session.
5. **If library staff do not understand the difference between information and advice, they will be very reluctant to provide legal information and referrals to patrons.** Librarians do not want to be thought to be giving legal advice as it is contrary to their ethical code. It was important to deal with this tension as this prohibition is reinforced in all their professional training. We developed a [resource](#) (this latest version is from CLEO’s Connecting Communities’ Project) to help distinguish legal information from legal advice and included this resource in the training.
6. **Being able to create and provide updating and training webinars was an important strategy.** We learned that the librarians were becoming increasingly accustomed to on-line professional development offered by their professional associations. Webinars and web conferences can work more efficient for some given the limited hours they have available. After speaking to public librarians about the need for refreshers, we learned that a webinar would be most useful. We know that both the CALC and CLEO webinars have been viewed more than 50 times suggesting that they are important resources.
7. **Maintaining ongoing contact with the librarians is also important whether it is formal or informal.** A celebratory event was recently organized: it is important to recognize in some tangible way both our success and our collaboration. We would caution against too many organizing meetings if at all possible. Since our project was so new, we had to hold a large number of meetings to get organized and to build our working relationship.
8. **CLEO’s work in improving the process for ordering up-to-date printed copies of legal information was crucial.** This thoughtful simplification has been a great asset for time-strapped librarians.
9. **Ensuring links to credible legal information on the libraries’ public computer home page welcome screens was an important strategy for “pushing” legal information to patrons who might need it.** The cooperation of libraries in adding links to CALC, CLEO and Your Legal Rights to their library websites was extremely important. Having these links helps librarians to promote the use of reliable legal information sites in order to help library users avoid finding information which is out of date, doesn’t apply in their jurisdiction, or is incorrect. Similarly, when CALC created legal information resources that would need frequent updating, we always ensured that the URL was on the printed resource and that library staff were always encouraged to use the URL instead to access the most up-to-date document.
10. **Making CALC staff always accessible to library staff through a “trusted intermediaries” hotline or email for questions is an important part of the partnership.** This means that library staff can call for help for a library patron at any time and be connected to a CALC staff person immediately.